



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

OFFICE OF COORDINATOR OF FISHERIES.

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Production of seafoods this year will reach less than 60 per cent of demand under present conditions, Fisheries Coordinator Harold L. Ickes announced today after a series of conferences with industry, labor, and consumer representatives.

"Although the Secretary of Agriculture estimates that a minimum catch of seven billion pounds (of seafood products) will be needed this year to supply the armed forces, our allies, and the civilian needs, the best opinion of the industry is that production will be no more than 3,650,000,000 pounds unless many of the industry's handicaps are removed," Coordinator Ickes said.

"It is probably true," he declared, "that our fisheries can produce more food per man hour and per dollar of invested capital than any other element in the food business. In view of this and with the knowledge that we are facing ever increasing demands on our food supply, it seems only reasonable to do everything possible to revive this vital source of supply."

"The amount of seafood production being demanded this year is greater than has been produced by the industry even under the best of conditions, with plenty of vessels and adequate manpower and no military and naval restrictions over the waters," Coordinator Ickes said, pointing out that in 1941, a peak year, U. S. fisheries produced less than five billion pounds.

Production of seafoods in 1942, due to unfavorable circumstances, fell to 3,700,000,000 pounds.

Seafood production also affects the production of other products. Fish meal is a common and necessary ingredient of poultry food, and any reduction in the amount available will have a corresponding affect on the production of poultry and eggs. Fish oil, rich in vitamins, is largely used in medicine and in various industries.

The fishing industry, despite its critical importance, has been more gravely affected by the war than many others. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, many of its craft were taken over by the armed forces. In some areas as many as 50 per cent of the available craft, including the most efficient vessels, were withdrawn from production and taken over. In addition many of the most important fishing areas available to our fishermen were restricted by the Army or Navy for security reasons. The manpower problem, both among fishermen and cannery workers, has been aggravated both by the draft and by the attraction of jobs in less seasonal industries.

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There are some bright spots, the Coordinator pointed out. The War Manpower Commission has recently issued a bulletin to local draft boards that men with certain skills in the industry are deferrable. Vessels are no longer taken over for the armed services without advising with the Coordinator of Fisheries, and negotiations are under way for the return of some of the craft.

"One of the most helpful factors will be the cooperation of the industry in making itself more efficient," the Coordinator said. "Industry and Labor both have shown every indication of being ready and willing to cooperate. With the pooling or exchange of resources and equipment, with simpler and better methods of processing and distributing, with any easing of the manpower situation, with more vessels, and fewer restrictions, maybe we can come somewhat nearer producing the amount of fish that the Food Administration has asked us to produce."